

She, he, you, me - who?

by Miriam Korn

Women and the Law, a group of women law students at Dalhousie, has distributed a pamphlet entitled *Inclusive Language* among their fellow law students.

The pamphlet was designed to increase awareness of the importance of gender inclusive language and to act as a guide for the use of gender inclusive language.

Inclusive Language makes suggestions such as avoiding the use of male-only pronouns by trying plural forms (ie. not "a staff member who owns his own car..." but "staff members who own their own cars..."), and substituting 'you' or 'one' for the word 'he.'

It also underlines the need for parallel treatment of both sexes. "Many concerns that have been labelled as 'women's issues' are also men's issues (ie. family matters)," the pamphlet states. The inappropriateness of an "emphasis on the appearance of a woman while describing men in terms of their qualifications or experience" is pointed out as well.

A list of substitutes for "excluding" words (ie. businessman, mankind, spinster) is included in the brochure.

"Women make up more than 50 per cent of society and are increasingly obtaining positions once excluded to them," said Beth Beatty, a first year law student

and member of Women and the Law. It is not realistic to refer to such positions using male terms, Beatty said.

Beatty notes that the Criminal Code of Canada, a major Canadian statute, uses the male pronoun throughout its 1989 version.

Marjorie Stone, an English professor at Dal, cited extensive research on the effects of sexist language as evidence for the importance of the issue.

"Many studies in sociolinguistics indicate that language that is not gender-inclusive is discriminatory. A student constantly encounters a male image.... Language reflects historical discrimination and perpetuates discrimination," Stone said.

Christine Boyle, a Dal professor of Law, pointed out the effect gender specific language has on one's education. "If people feel excluded, they are not learning effectively. Both students and teachers need to be careful."

One of the main purposes of the pamphlet was to get feedback from students, said Beatty.

According to Stone, "most students are quite unaware of the issue. It is surprising that it is not more emphasized in high school." She took part in the making of a video intended to bring the matter to light, entitled "A Word in Edgewise," now shown at Queen Elizabeth High School.

"I think she's going a bit far," was a comment made by one student in reference to one of Stone's lectures in which she suggested such changes as "degenderizing" the Bible (ie. the Mother/Father) and using "caveperson" instead of "caveman."

Leon Trakman, professor of law, said that a "significant number" of students are careful to use gender inclusive language, however, "a large number of papers do use patriarchal language."

Most people agree that professors at Dal are fairly conscientious about using inclusive language. "We talk about it a lot," said Trakman. "It is extremely important and valuable."

"Dalhousie is a very self-conscious school," said Trakman, "especially in the law school which deals with many sex discrimination cases." He added, however, that any "chauvinism is submerged."

Stone agreed that "professors in Law or Arts, especially Social sciences are more inclined to be sensitive to the issue, since there are more female faculty and students in these departments."

However, she pointed out, in most science departments there are more men than women. "I think that affects the sensitivity." She feels, however, that "they do not intend to discriminate."

John Farley, a Dal biology professor, acknowledged the

lack of sensitivity to the issue in the science faculties. But Farley, himself, referred to gender inclusive language as "meaningless."

"If a person uses it in his writing, it doesn't mean he's not prejudiced," Farley said.

Farley admits to rarely making a concerted effort to use such language in verbal communication, but he said he may have to start using it in his writing now that "a graduate student beat me over the head with it."

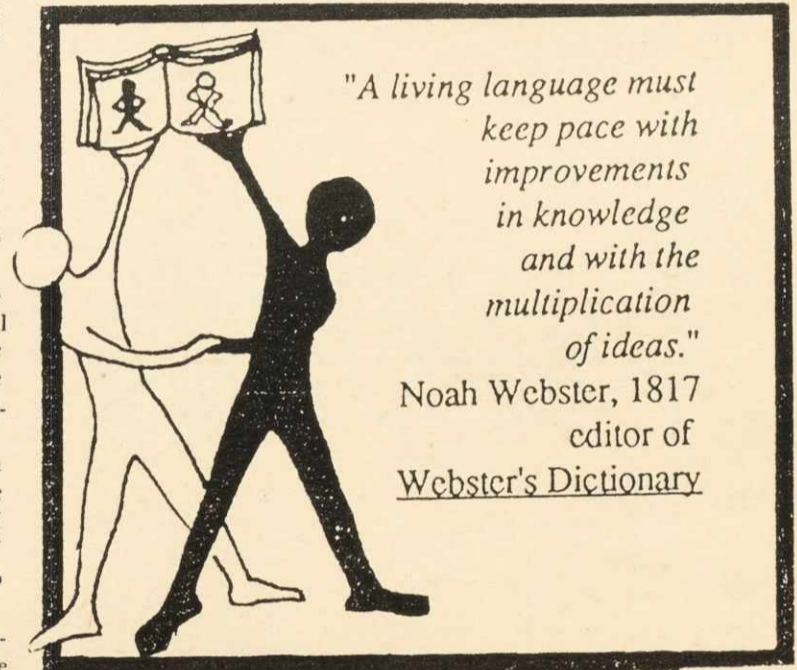
"It is silly to pluralize everything," Farley added. "Faculty sitting around arguing about whether to say 'chairman' or

'chairperson' would drive me to drink."

Beatty recognizes that some women as well as men are not politicized about their use of language, yet she maintains that the issue is important.

"There is one thing that kills me," said Beatty. "If it's okay to say 'he' and assume that it includes women, why do so many men refuse to be included by the term 'she'?"

A similar pamphlet was produced last year which, according to Beatty, "did not go over too well" apparently because of the way it was prepared.



Minorities ignored in pamphlets

by Sandy MacKay

What enticed you to come to Dalhousie? Perhaps it was the photographs in the recruitment booklet of happy brave students windsurfing in Halifax Harbour. Maybe it was the photograph of



the people feeding the seal.

Students from the Black Canadian Students Association and the Dalhousie University Aboriginal Students Association met recently with President Howard Clark and vice-president Eric McKee to discuss issues of access.

Recruitment booklets came up as a topic for discussion.

According to Archy Beals, the president of the Black Canadian Students Association (BCSA), the booklet is an example of Dalhousie's lack of concern for local Blacks and Natives.

A recent task force report ("Breaking the Barriers" — see Gazette, Oct. 5, 1989) encouraged the administration to increase active recruiting in Black and Native communities, but Beals says the new booklets are not doing that.

"The targeted Blacks and Natives aren't represented," he says. "There are no photos of blacks, no mention of them in the text, and it's not a good representation of us at Dal." Beals said the booklet was designed before the task force came forward with its suggestions, but said, "there have been Blacks on this campus for 20 years, and this is another example of how we have been excluded."

Theresa Meuse of the Dalhousie University Aboriginal Students Association (DUASA) said, "the booklets are not one of our main concerns. There's not much representation of Native students. It's a little biased,

apparently, but it's not a top priority." She said Native students were waiting to see the results of the task force's recommendations on Black and Native accessibility.

Vice-President of Dalhousie Eric McKee accepted the fact that there were no students that could be identified as Nova Scotian Blacks or Natives in the booklets. Six of the 66 people represented in photographs in the booklet are visible minorities.

Further omissions include the physically challenged, although last year's recruiting booklet did have a photo of a physically challenged student.

One student said, "it's not only the lack of good representation, but look at the photos as well. There's one of students windsurfing, and students playing hockey and basketball, but no pictures of any of the ramps on campus. Just who are they trying to target?"

Archy Beals of the BCSA said the booklet was indicative of the University's ignorance of the Black presence at Dalhousie. "I take a course in the history of the Atlantic provinces, and no Blacks are mentioned in the course, except the Black Loyalists. Part of

the solution is to have the Black influence included in current courses, and not just about slavery, because there's more positive things to be looked at than that."

Beals said the efforts the Law School is making to include Blacks and Natives in the curriculum are steps in the right direction. "It's a door that's been opened. It's the beginning of a new circle. I challenge the other professional schools at Dal to do the same."

The task force that came out in September urged the Dalhousie Administration to upgrade education facilities for Nova Scotian Blacks and Natives. Implementation of the task force's recommendations has not yet begun, but representatives of Black and Native groups feel the recommendations are positive. They feel confident that Dalhousie will follow through with the recommendations.

"They will have to continue to meet with the communities involved," said Jean Knockwood, the Native Student Counsellor. "They need to hold a major conference, so they can say, 'OK, these are the things we can implement immediately.'"